

HISTORIC ST. PATRICK TO SOAR AGAIN

Replacing church's steeple is part of restoration

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Yellow scaffolding intrudes upon the high altar of the Historic Church of St. Patrick downtown. Religious figures peek through plastic draping.

But it's still breathtaking to Deacon Tom Carone - and the best is yet to come.

"I like to sit in here and just absorb the beauty of it," he said earlier this week from one of the pews.

The church is in the midst of the most comprehensive restoration since it was built over a century ago, and the process is opening eyes among some parishioners as artwork is cleaned with the help of a conservator, walls are painted, and lights restored.

"Now we're seeing things for the first time," said the Rev. Dennis P. Hartigan.

Such as the 12 clean circular paintings of sacred images sprinkled throughout the church, which used to be "just brown spots," according to Father Hartigan.

Most of the changes - which will cost nearly \$3 million - will be celebrated June 10 with a Mass of Thanksgiving, but the coup de gras, the installation of a new steeple after more than 25 years, will have to wait until September, when a "skybreaking" is scheduled.

The steeple, which will return the church building to a height of 240 feet, has been missing from Toledo's skyline since 1980, when the church on Avondale Avenue was struck by lightning and the steeple was destroyed. Replacing it has been on the minds of parishioners for quite some time.



The Rev. Dennis Hartigan, left, Sue Fanelly, and Tom Carone inside the Historic Church of St. Patrick downtown.. (BLADE PHOTOS/JETTA FRASER)



The church's steeple is scheduled to be replaced. A 'skybreaking' will be held in September.

"It's like an incomplete church," Mr. Carone said.

Spurring all of this work is a bequest from the estate of Margaret Hays Tank, who left \$6 million to the parish when she died in 2006. Father Hartigan said that interest from that gift is being used on the restoration, as well as donations from parishioners.

The cost of the steeple alone will be \$800,000.

Part of the project includes an outdoor memorial garden with a Celtic cross dedicated to Mrs. Tank and a new plaza in front of the church, where there will be a fountain.

The project will touch on an array of areas inside the church, including plaster work and installing a state-of-the-art sound system. The church's original doors will get hand-carved replacements and mahogany statues have been commissioned of St. Peregrine, the patron saint of cancer patients, and St. Gerard, the patron saint of expectant mothers.

As part of all the changes, the Eucharist will be moved from a side chapel to the high altar, Father Hartigan said.

Work began inside the church in January, and at times it has reduced seating so that some people have had to stand during services.

"It's been awkward because up 'til this week the scaffolding covered half the church," Father Hartigan said.

But Sue Fanelly, a member of the church's building committee, said it's all been worth it.

"It really hasn't been an imposition," she said.

Some of the scaffolding and other evidence of work still remains, but visitors are starting to get a glimpse of the results, and the Father Hartigan said the response has been very positive.

"A frequent reaction is a mouth-opening, the drop of a jaw," he said.

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